

4-H Community Service Learning Initiative



Each time 4-H members recite the above 4-H pledge they are recommitting themselves to serving their communities. During 2003, 4-H youth in King County volunteered over 20,000 hours of service to their communities. 4-H clubs and groups volunteer their services as they learn new skills from 4-H project curriculums offering a broad variety of topics including environmental science, financial literacy, the arts, nutrition and gardening, and leadership. As youth progress through their selected projects, they not only increase their knowledge of the subject matter, but they also learn important life skills by experiencing them in practice. The strategy of learning through service is a new form of community service called Service Learning.

Program Goals:

- Learn positive life skills
- Deepen and broaden knowledge in a variety of content areas
- Increase connection to the community
- Become active citizens

Community service learning shows promise as a powerful learning tool

During the past 5 years, there has been great interest among educators in the research about the relationship between service and learning. There is growing evidence that when community service is performed as an integral part of the learning process, the new knowledge and/or skills are more deeply understood and incorporated within the learner. Mary Purvis, of Educational Service District 105, reports research indicating that “young people who are engaged in defining, solving and evaluating solutions to problems are less likely to be overcome by these problems.” Thus, 4-H, other youth development organizations and schools have adopted Service Learning as an educational strategy.



Caylin holds one of the “graduates” of the Pediatric Interim Care Center who received one of the 80 quilts made during this Service Learning project.

Photo: Tennison

Service Learning Partnerships in King County

King County 4-H has been providing support for service learning through training of leaders and youth in development of their own service learning projects, training of teachers and higher education faculty on integration of service learning into their curriculums, provision of a new service learning curriculum titled Public Adventures, and through development of a unique servicelearning website. During 2003, over 100 4-H youth and volunteer leaders received training in use of the Public Adventures curriculum at Super Saturday trainings held in King County and at the State 4-H Leaders Forum held in Wenatchee. A 5-week seminar series on Service Learning Leadership was developed and presented to 7 higher education faculty and community agency volunteer coordinators the outcomes of which were 7 site specific project to increase service learning among youth from age 6 through college graduation.

A Successful Service Learning Project...

One example of a very successful Service Learning project was the Quiltathon designed and organized by Caylin Tennison, a 15 year-old Lindbergh High School sophomore and 10-year 4-H club member. As soon as Caylin learned of the Pediatric Interim Care Center (PICC) and its unique services to drug-affected infants, she immediately began thinking of ways she could support this effort. Her Service Learning project goal was to sew at least 75 quilts so they each infant could go home with one upon graduating from the PICC. Caylin wrote a grant to fund the purchase of fabrics and notions, found a neighbor to build the small frames, and created a brochure to publicize the event. Over a period of eight months, 4-H members, their families and the public came together to measure, press, cut, sandwich, sew and tie these 2' X 2' quilts. Caylin was able to present 80 quilts to the center in March. When asked what she learned, Caylin commented not only does she feel great about the contribution she made to help the infants, but she learned that good planning is essential to a good outcome.



4-H Youth display one of the quilts for drug-affected infants that they made during their Quiltathon Service Learning project.

Photo-Elizabeth Tennison

Service Learning website now online

Support through technology is being developed through a new service learning website located at <http://servicelearning.wsu.edu>

This website is the result of a partnership between King County 4-H and WSU-Pullman campus with Seattle School District and United Way of King County. The website provides information and training about service learning for youth, parents, leaders and teachers, and community service learning site supervisors. Because reflection on the experience is an important contributor to the depth and breadth of learning from the service, the website features a unique online reflection survey to be completed by the youth. Specific versions of the survey are also available online for parents, leaders and teachers, and community site supervisors. Upon submission, the survey data becomes part of a database which will become a rich source of information for future research on the status and trends of service learning. Interim reports of the data will be available by request from King County 4-H. We expect to have the basic website fully operational by the end of 2004.

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